

An enthusiasm for a more habitat-based conservation strategy is always difficult to effect when faced with an endangered species which always needs special attention. However there have been people who have tried to have a habitat-based conservation strategy in the UK in the past, but their ideas have never prevailed.

Overall, the track record of conserving butterflies in Britain has not been terribly successful, nothing that lepidopterists, statutory conservation bodies, 'secret' conservation societies or individuals can be very proud of. Great progress has been made since 1975 through Butterfly Conservation, but there were significant moves in the conservation process for the 50 years before. That most conservation bodies can come together and talk via Wildlife Link is to be applauded.

As for conserving Britain's butterflies, the theory can be easy—and has been well spelt out over 70 years—but getting it right can be very confusing and controversial, with a lot of duplication of research.—JOHN FELTWELL, 'Marlham', Henley's Down, Battle, East Sussex TN33 9BN.

A response to the letter by John Feltwell.—My note was clearly addressing the era of which Butterfly Conservation has been a part, and with a concern that the various societies should take a constructive view for the future. I am, therefore, pleased to see that John Feltwell endorses the positive role Butterfly Conservation has played.

It is disappointing that John has been so negative in much of his letter, with aspersions liberally cast. As a historian he must surely be aware of the pitfalls of injecting bias and failing to balance the facts.

I am aware of the historical context and the lessons to be learnt, one of which is that success in preventing decline in butterflies and other invertebrates takes far more detailed knowledge of species ecology than was earlier realized. More broadly, the historic perspective includes the rapid land-use changes since the Second World War and the limited resources for invertebrate conservation. A further historic lesson is that whilst there have been plenty of moaners about the lack of action to halt the decline in butterflies and other insects, relatively few entomologists made a personal commitment to take constructive action themselves. Let's be positive and recognize that a great deal has been achieved in recent years and that there has been a considerable turn-round in the willingness to be constructive within the agencies, many of the societies and the entomological community as a whole—and everyone is on a learning curve.

Some of John's statements, direct and implied, are patently untrue if applied to the agencies. For instance, the criticism that species conservation has become predominant over habitat conservation, and that past concerns for habitat conservation have not prevailed, flies in the face of reality. The predominant effort over the last 20 years has been habitat-based. This is the only way of catering for 30 000 species of invertebrates and most of the conservation network is site-based, including site management.

It is entirely healthy that organizations, particularly government ones, should be held accountable for their policies and practice. In NC I was Deputy Head of Geology and Physiography with no locus in entomology; in 1974 I joined the Chief Scientist's Team of NCC with the remit to develop an invertebrate conservation strategy. I am happy to be held accountable for matters that were under my control. Regrettably, the nature of John's letter risks cultivating myths about the agencies that will not serve future historians.—ALAN STUBBS, 181 Broadway, Peterborough PE1 4DS.